

Fear-mongers blocking closer Canada-U.S. ties: expert

JOHN WARD

OTTAWA (CP) - Fear-mongers are partly to blame for blocking closer economic and social co-operation between Canada and the United States, says a prominent American academic.

Robert Pastor, director of the Center for North American Studies at American University in Washington, D.C., blames "extremists" on both sides of the border for heading off efforts at more continental integration. He cited American TV commentators such as Lou Dobbs and Patrick Buchanan and Canadian activist Maude Barlow as examples of those who raise alarms at any suggestion of closer North American ties.

"The debate has been skewed by the fear-mongers and conspiracy theorists," he said Monday.

Dobbs and his ilk want tighter borders and accuse Canada of being a gangplank for terrorists seeking to enter the United States.

Barlow and the Council of Canadians see a danger of Canada becoming little more than an appendage of Washington.

Neither case is true, said Pastor, but activists keep governments wary.

He said the North American Free Trade Agreement was strongly opposed by fear-mongers on all sides, but it has benefited Canada, the U.S. and Mexico.

Some Canadians feared free trade would see Americans taking over the Canadian economy, but Pastor said Canadian direct investment in the United States has grown at a faster clip than American investment here.

He said it's time to go beyond NAFTA, for example, by integrating regulations in many fields.

In trucking, differences between Mexican and American rules are so pronounced that "its more expensive to move a truck between Monterrey and Long Beach, Calif., than it is to move a shipping container from Shanghai to Long Beach."

Pastor also suggested drug regulators in all three countries pool their efforts and save time and duplicated effort when approving new pharmaceuticals.

He said Canada and the U.S. are working together at the bureaucratic level, but those efforts are largely unseen.

He is suggesting the creation of a North American commission or council, bringing together government officials and other groups, such as unions, environmentalists, academics and others, to propose a new agenda for closer co-operation.

Pastor was a member of the U.S. national security council in the Carter administration. He was nominated as American ambassador to Panama by then-president Bill Clinton in 1993, but his confirmation was blocked by Republican opposition in the Senate.

© The Canadian Press, 2007